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Date: 1/3/2011

To: Department of Justice, Registration Unit

Fax Number: (202) 514-2836

From: Qorvis Communications, LLC 202-496-1000

Pages (total): _____

Re: FARA

Comments: _____

2011 JAN -3 PM 2:42

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The documents were distributed on behalf of the Republic of Cyprus.

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From: Jennifer Baskerville
Sent: Thursday, December 30, 2010 12:17 PM
To: jbaskerville@qorvis.com
Subject: Gross Violation of Religious Freedoms in the Occupied Part of Cyprus on Christmas



EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
Washington, D.C.

Gross Violation of Religious Freedoms in the Occupied Part of Cyprus on Christmas

WASHINGTON – December 30, 2010 – During the morning service on Christmas at the Church of Agios Synesios at Rizokarpaso, located in the northern Turkish-occupied part of Cyprus, so-called “police officers” of the illegal Turkish Cypriot regime entered the church, ordered the priest to stop the liturgy, forced the priest and the Christian Orthodox Cypriot worshippers attending the service out of the church and proceeded to lock its doors.

The “police officers” claimed that they stopped the service on instructions by the so-called “Ministry of Foreign Affairs” of the occupation regime, because the priest did not obtain prior permission to conduct Christmas service. However, the church has been operating for 36 years (since the Turkish invasion and subsequent occupation) on a regular basis without the need for prior permission. This notwithstanding, the Archbishop of Cyprus stated that permission was obtained in this instance.

The incident was confirmed by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), which has asked for a full explanation for the events from the occupation regime.

The Government of the Republic of Cyprus condemns this unacceptable action of the Turkish occupation regime carried out on one of the most holy days for Christianity. The act constitutes a clear violation of the basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in particular, the religious freedoms of the Christian Orthodox Greek Cypriots who continue to live in the northern occupied part of Cyprus.

More specifically, the interruption of the church service by the Turkish occupation regime violated:

- (a) The Third Vienna Agreement of August 1975 which continues to be the only agreement providing for the treatment of Greek Cypriots living in the occupied areas of Cyprus. According to this agreement, “... the Greek Cypriots at present in the North of the Island are free to stay and that they will be given every help

to lead a normal life, including facilities for education and for the practice of their religion..."

(b) Articles 3 and 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECoHR), which state that "No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Article 3) and that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom..., either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance" (Article 9). Turkey was found responsible for violating both these articles in the Judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Cyprus v Turkey (May 10, 2001).

(c) Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948), according to which "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

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Material is distributed by Qorvis Communications on behalf of the Embassy of Cyprus. More information can be found at the Department of Justice.

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